



Firefighter's family to get 9/11 benefit

Justice Dept. ends legal battle; family now hopes for Medal of Valor

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NEW YORK - After a five-year fight, the U.S. government has dropped its effort to prevent a volunteer firefighter killed at the World Trade Center from receiving a federal death benefit for public safety officers who die on the job.

The decision is a belated victory for the family of Glenn Winuk, a longtime member of the Jericho Volunteer Fire Department who rushed to the burning towers on Sept. 11, 2001, to tend to victims of the terrorist attack.

Winuk, 40, was working at his Manhattan law office the morning of the attacks, but he grabbed a medical bag and raced to pitch in with the rescue effort. He died when the skyscrapers collapsed; when his body was found in the rubble, months later, he was wearing surgical gloves and a stethoscope.

The Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Assistance fought his family's effort to collect a \$250,000 payment due to police officers, firefighters and other government emergency workers killed in the line of duty.

The agency argued that the benefit was intended only for active-duty public safety officers, and that Winuk didn't qualify because he hadn't been on regular duty with his volunteer department on Long Island since 1998.

The turning point in the case came when a judge on the Federal Court of Claims sided with the family last June, ruling that the government's denial of the benefit had been arbitrary.

'Fight has gone on too long'

The long court battle finally ended on Jan. 10, after the Office of the Solicitor General decided to drop its last appeal in the case.

"It's really terrific. This fight has gone on too long," said Glenn's brother, Jay Winuk.

Although the move clears the way for Winuk's parents to receive the \$250,000, the family says their primary interest is in achieving proper government recognition for Glenn's public service.

"It's very meaningful to my parents," Jay Winuk said.

He added that he hoped President Bush would now see fit to award his late brother the 9/11 Heroes Medal of Valor, which was given to the relatives of 442 other public safety officers killed in the terrorist attacks.

A number of New York officials supported the family's campaign for a payment from the Public Safety Officers Benefits Program, including state lawmakers who passed a statute declaring that Winuk died in the line of duty.

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